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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZADLIG NEWSPAPER EDITOR ARRESTED, SENTENCED TO
TWO MONTHS' PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Classified By: ACTING POL/ECON CHIEF DAVID MCCORMICK PER 1.4(B,D).

¶1. (SBU) On November 10, Editor-In-Chief of Azadlig newspaper Ganimat Zahid was arrested on charges of hooliganism and inflicting minor bodily harm. The charges were based on a complaint filed by a private citizen, alleging that Zahid had struck him during a November 7 altercation. Prior to his arrest, Zahid went public with his account of the November 7 events, which he maintained was a set-up. According to Zahid, he had been entering the building that houses Azadlig's office, when a woman suddenly began shouting that he had insulted her. A nearby man, described as having a "sportsman's" physique, became involved, shouting at Zahid "I'll show you." In his complaint, the man claimed to have been struck by Zahid.

¶2. (SBU) Late on the evening of Sunday, November 11, a Yasamal district court judge ruled that Zahid will remain in detention for a period of two months, while an investigation of the incident is conducted. By the end of the two-month period, the court must officially charge Zahid with a crime or rule to extend this period of pre-trial detention. Court officials did not permit Emboffs, journalists, or human rights activists access to the courtroom; in fact, one police officer told an Embassy officer - in English - to "go away." On November 12, civil society representatives established a working group to defend Zahid's rights.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Ganimat Zahid is slight of build, not intimidating, and we have not known him to be prone to altercations. Zahid is the brother of imprisoned satirical journalist Mirza Sakit, who has been imprisoned since 2006 for narcotics possession, which observers believe to be spurious. Based on our understanding of the circumstances of this case and the local cultural context, we believe that this was likely a deliberate attempt to frame this well-known critic of the government. Zahid's detention is the latest in a disturbing trend of cases of harassment, physical violence, lawsuits, and imprisonment of media representatives. We will continue to engage with the GOAJ to press the need for media reforms, and will monitor this case and report any substantive developments.

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